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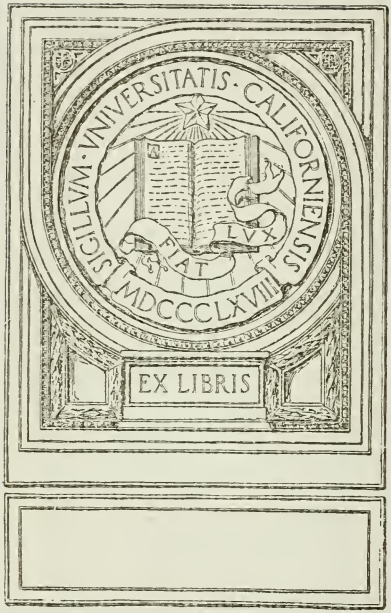
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TWO POEMS TRANSLATED FROM THE GAELIC

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THE MIDNIGHT COURT

and

THE ADVENTURES OF A LUCKLESS FELLOW

Translated from the Gaelic

by

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&

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Introduction

Months ago Mr. Ussher asked me to introduce his translation of *The Midnight Court*. I had seen a few pages in an Irish magazine; praised its vitality; my words had been repeated; and because I could discover no reason for refusal that did not make me a little ashamed, I consented. Yet I could wish that a Gaelic scholar had been found, or failing that some man of known sobriety of manner and of mind – Professor Trench of Trinity College let us say – to introduce to the Irish reading public this vital, extravagant, immoral, preposterous poem.

Brian Mac Giolla Meidhre – or to put it in English, Brian Merriman – wrote in Gaelic, one final and three internal rhymes in every line, pouring all his mediaeval abundance into that narrow neck. He was born early in the eighteenth century, somewhere in Clare, even now the most turbulent of counties, and the countrymen of Clare and of many parts of Munster have repeated his poem down to our own day. Yet this poem which is so characteristically Gaelic and mediaeval is founded upon

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Cadenus and Vanessa,[1] read perhaps in some country gentleman's library. The shepherds and nymphs of Jonathan Swift plead by counsel before Venus:

'Accusing the false creature man.
The brief with weighty crimes was charged
On which the pleader much enlarged,
That Cupid now has lost his art,
Or blunt the point of every dart.'

[1] Mr. Robin Flower pointed this out to me. *Cadenus and Vanessa*, which has the precision of fine prose, is the chief authority for the first meeting of Swift and Esther Vanhomrigh. I think it was Sir Walter Scott who first suggested 'a constitutional infirmity' to account for Swift's emotional entanglement, but this suggestion is not supported by Irish tradition. Some years ago a one-act play was submitted to the Abbey Theatre reading committee which showed Swift saved from English soldiers at the time of the 'Drapier letters' by a young harlot he was accustomed to visit. The author claimed that though the actual incident was his invention, his view of Swift was traditional, and inquiry proved him right. I had always known that stories of Swift and his serving man were folklore all over Ireland and now I learned from country friends why the man was once dismissed. Swift sent him out to fetch a woman and when Swift woke in the morning he found that she was a negress.

Men have made marriage mercenary and love an intrigue; but the shepherds' counsel answers that the fault lies with women who have changed love for 'gross desire' and care but for 'fops and fools and rakes.' Venus finds the matter so weighty that she calls the Muses and the Graces to her assistance and consults her books of law – Ovid, Virgil, Tibullus, Cowley, Waller – continuously adjourns the court for sixteen years, and then after the failure of an experiment gives the case in favour of the women. The experiment is the creation of Vanessa, who instead of becoming all men's idol and reformer, all women's example, repels both by her learning and falls in love with her tutor Swift.

The Gaelic poet changed a dead to a living mythology, and called men and women to plead before Eevell of Craglee, the chief of Munster Spirits, and gave her court reality by seeing it as a vision upon a midsummer day under a Munster tree. No countryman of that time doubted, nor in all probability did the poet doubt, the existence of Eevell, a famous figure to every story-teller. The mediaeval convention of a dream or vision has served the turn of innumerable licen-

tious rhymers in Gaelic and other languages, of Irish Jacobites who have substituted some personification of Ireland, some Dark Rosaleen, for a mortal mistress, of learned poets who call before our eyes an elaborate allegory of courtly love. I think of Chaucer's 'Romaunt of the Rose,' his 'Book of the Duchess,' and of two later poems that used to be called his, 'Chaucer's Dream' and 'The Complaint of the Black Knight.' But in all these the vision comes in May.

'That it was May, me thoughte tho,
It is fyve yere or more ago;
That it was May, thus dreamed me
In tyme of love and jolitie
That all things ginneth waxen gay.'

One wonders if there is some Gaelic precedent for changing the spring festival for that of summer, the May-day singing of the birds to the silence of summer fields. Had Mac Giolla Meidhre before his mind the fires of St. John's Night, for all through Munster men and women leaped the fires that they might be fruitful, and after scattered the ashes that the fields might be fruitful also. Certainly it is not possible to read his verses without being shocked and horrified

as city onlookers were perhaps shocked and horrified at the free speech and buffoonery of some traditional country festival.

He wrote at a moment of national discouragement, the penal laws were still in force though weakening, the old order was a vivid memory but with the failure of the last Jacobite rising hope of its return had vanished, and no new political dream had come. The state of Ireland is described: 'Her land purloined, her law decayed . . . pastures with weeds o'ergrown, her ground untilled . . . hirelings holding the upper hand,' and worst of all – and this the fairy court has been summoned to investigate – 'the lads and lasses have left off breeding.' Are the men or the women to blame? A woman speaks first, and it is Swift's argument but uttered with voluble country extravagance, and as she speaks one calls up a Munster hearth, farmers sitting round at the day's end, some old farmer famous through all the countryside for this long recitation, speaking or singing with dramatic gesture. If a man marries, the girl declares, he does not choose a young girl but some rich scold 'with a hairless crown and a snotty nose.' Then she

describes her own beauty and asks if she is not more fit for marriage? She has gone everywhere 'bedizened from top to toe,' but because she lacks money nobody will look at her and she is single still.

'After all I have spent upon readers of palms
And tellers of tea-leaves and sellers of charms.'

Then an old man replies, and heaps upon her and upon her poverty-stricken father and family all manner of abuse: he is the champion of the men, and he will show where the blame lies. He tells of his own marriage. He was a man of substance but has been ruined by his wife who gave herself up to every sort of dissipation – Swift's argument again. A child was born, but when he asked to see the child the women tried to cover it up, and when he did see it, it was too fine, too handsome and vigorous to be a child of his. And now Swift is forgotten and dramatic propriety, the poet speaks through the old man's mouth and asks Eevell of Craglee to abolish marriage that such children may be born in plenty.

'For why call a Priest in to bind and to bless
Since Mary the Mother of God did conceive

Without calling the Clergy or begging their leave,
The love-gotten children are famed as the flower
Of man's procreation and nature's power,
For love is a lustier sire than law,
And has made them sound without fault or flaw
And better and braver in heart and head
Than the puny breed of the marriage bed.'

The bastard's speech in Lear is floating through his mind mixed up doubtless with old stories of Diarmuid's and Cuchullain's loves, and old dialogues where Oisin railed at Patrick; but there is something more, an air of personal conviction that is of his age, something that makes his words—spoken to that audience – more than the last song of Irish paganism. One remembers that Burns is about to write his beautiful defiant 'Welcome to his love-begotten daughter' and that Blake who is defiant in thought alone meditates perhaps his 'Marriage of Heaven and Hell.' The girl replies to the old man that if he were not so old and crazed she would break his bones, and that if his wife is unfaithful what better could he expect seeing that she was starved into marrying him. However, she has her own solution. Let all the handsome

young priests be compelled to marry. Then Eevell of Craglee gives her judgment, the Priests are left to the Pope who will order them into marriage one of these days, but let all other young men marry or be stripped and beaten by her spirits, and let all old bachelors be tortured by the spinsters. The poem ends by the girl falling upon the poet and beating him because he is unmarried. He is ugly and humped, she says, but might look as well as another in the dark.

Standish Hayes O'Grady has described the *Midnight Court* as the best poem written in Gaelic, and as I read Mr. Ussher's translation I have felt, without sharing what seems to me an extravagant opinion, that Giolla Meidhre, had political circumstances been different, might have founded a modern Gaelic literature. Mac Conmara, or Macnamara, though his poem is of historical importance, does not interest me so much. He knew Irish and Latin only, knew nothing of his own age, saw vividly but could not reflect upon what he saw, and so remained an amusing provincial figure.

W. B. YEATS.

THE MIDNIGHT COURT

TRANSLATED BY PERCY ARLAND USSHER
FROM THE GAELIC OF BRIAN MERRIMAN

In Four Parts

Part One

*

'Twas my wont to wander beside the stream
On the soft greensward in the morning beam,
Where the woods stand thick on the mountain-
side
Without trouble or care what might betide.
My heart would leap at the lake's near blue,
The horizon and the far-off view,
The hills that rear their heads on high
Over each other's backs to spy.

'Twould gladden the soul with dole oppressed,
With sorrows seared and with cares obsessed
Of the outcast Gael without gold or goods
To watch for a while o'er the tops of the woods
The ducks in their flocks on the tide, the swan
Gliding with stately gait along,
The fish that leap on the air with glee
And the speckled perch with gambols free,
The labouring waves laving the shore
With glistening spray and rumbling roar,
The sea-gulls shrieking and reeling wide,
And the red deer romping in woodland ride,
The bugle's blare and the huntsman's yell
And the hue and cry of the pack pell-mell.
Yesterday morn the sky was clear
In the dog-days' heat of the mad mid-year,
And the sun was scouring the slumb'rous air
With his burning beams and gleaming glare,
And the leaves lay dense on the bending trees
And the lush grass waved in the scented breeze.
Blossom and spray and spreading leaf
Lightened my load and laid my grief,
Weary and spent with aching brain

I sank and lay on the murmuring plain,
In the shade of a tree with feet outspread
With my hot brow bared and shoe-gear shed.
When I closed the lids on my languid eyes
And covered my face from teasing flies
In slumber deep and in sleep's delusion
The scene was changed in strange confusion,
My frame was heaved and my head turned round
Without sense or sight in sleep profound.
I fancied there as I dare avouch
That the land was quaking beneath my couch,
And a hurricane blew with fury o'er me
And tongues of fire flared forth before me.
I threw a glance with beglamoured eyes
And beheld a hag of hideous guise,
Her shape with age and ague shook,
The plain she scoured with glowering look,
Her girth was huge, her height was quite
Seven yards or more if I reckoned it right,
Her cloak's tail trailed a perch's length,
She gripped a staff with manful strength,
Her aspect stark with angry stare,
Her features tanned by wind and air,

Her rheumy eyes were red and blear,
Her mouth was stretched from ear to ear,
A plate of brass held fast her bonnet
With bailiff's powers inscribed upon it.
She grimly gazed and gruffly spake:–
'You lazy laggard, arise! awake!
Is this the way for you, wretch, to be,
When the court is seated for all to see?
No court of robbers and spoilers strong
To maintain the bane of fraud and wrong,
But the court of the poor and lowly-born,
The court of women and folk forlorn.
It's joyful hearing for Erin that
The Good Folk's Host [1] have in Council sat
On the mountain's summit for three days' space
In Brean Moy Graney's meeting-place.
His Highness grieves and his noble throng
That Erin lingers in thraldom long,
Wasted by woe without respite,
To misery's hand abandoned quite,
Her land purloined, her laws decayed,
Her wealth destroyed and her trust betrayed,

[1] The fairies.

Her fields and pastures with weeds o'ergrown,
Her ground untilled and her crops unsown,
Her chieftains banished and an upstart band
Of hirelings holding the upper hand,
Who'd skin the widow and orphan child
And grind the weak and the meek and mild.
Shame 'tis, sure, that the poor oppressed
By lawless might, in plight distressed,
Get nought for aught but extortion vile,
The judge's fraud and the lawyer's wile,
The tyrant's frown and the sycophant's sneer
Bribing with fee and with fawning leer.
'Twas among the plaints that there were pleaded –
For every wrong was heard and heeded –
A charge in which you'll be implicated,
That the men and youths remain unmated,
And your maids in spinsterhood repining
And their bloom and beauty in age declining,
And the human race apace decreasing
With wars and famines and plagues unceasing,
The pride of kings and princes feeding,
Since your lads and lasses have left off breeding.
Your scanty brood 'tis sad to see

With women in bands on land and sea,
Buxom maids that fade obscure
And tender slips with lips that lure,
Damsels shy by shame retarded
And willing wenches unregarded.
'Tis sad no noble seed should rise
From lads of lusty thews and thighs,
'Twere well could all know what maids' woes are,
Prepared to fall on the first proposer.
To consider the case with due precision
The council came to a new decision,
To find the fittest among the throng
To learn the right and requite the wrong.
They appointed straight a maid serene,
Eevell of Craglee, Munster's queen,
To hold her court and preside there o'er it
And invite the plaintiffs to plead before it.
The gentle lady swore to elicit
Of falsehood purged the truth explicit,
To hear the plea of the unbefriended
And see the state of the hapless mended.
This court is seated in Feakle now,
Arise and trudge, for you thither must go,

Arise and trudge without more delay,
Arise at once for I'll take no nay!'
She clapped her claw on my cape behind
And whisked me away like a wisp on the wind
O'er mud and mire, mountain and valley,
To Moinmoy Hill at the churchyard alley.
'Tis sure I saw with torches flaring
A lofty hall with trumpets blaring,
With glare of light and brightly burnished,
With fleeces draped and great doors furnished,
And the portly queen with a courtly gesture
On the judge's bench in a splendid vesture,
And a troop of toughs with gruff demeanour
To clear the court and escort and screen her,
And people in throngs along the benches
Both women and men and boys and wenches,
And a weeping nymph in the witness-box
Of comely mould and golden locks,
With heaving breast and face aflame
And tears that gushed with grief and shame,
With flowing hair and staring eyes
And moans and groans and sobs and sighs.
Her passion's blast at last abated,

Weary of woe, with sorrow sated,
She dried her eyes, her sighs surmounted,
And in these words her woes recounted:-
'We give you greeting, Eevell fair,
Gracious queen, your people's care,
Who pity the poor and relieve their plight
And save the brave and retrieve the right.
'Tis the cause of my anguish and grief of heart,
The source of my sorrow and inward smart,
My wounding rending pain unending,
The way our women thro' life are wending,
Gray, gloomy nuns with the grave pursuing,
Since our men and maidens have left off wooing;
Myself among them condemned to wait
Without hope and mope in the maiden state,
Without husband heaping the golden store
Or children creeping on hearth and floor,
In dread and fear-a drear subsistence-
Of finding nought to support existence,
By troubles pressed and by rest forsaken,
By cares consumed and by sorrows shaken.
Chaste Eevell, hasten to the relief
Of the women of Erin in their grief,

Wasting their pains in vain endeavour
To meet with mates who elude them ever,
Till in the ages is such disparity
We would not touch them except from charity,
With bleary eyes and wry grimaces
To scare a maiden from their embraces.
And if in manhood's warm pulsation
A youth is tempted to change his station,
He chooses a dour and sour-faced scold
Who's wasted her days in raising gold;
No lively lass of sweet seventeen
Of figure neat and features clean,
But blear-eyed hag or harridan brown
With toothless jaws and hairless crown
And snotty nose and dun complexion
And offering constant shrill correction.
My heart is torn and worn with grieving,
And my breast distressed with restless heaving,
With torture dull and with desperation
At the thought of my dismal situation,
When I see a bonny and bold young blade
With comely features and frame displayed,
A sturdy swearer or spanking buck,

A sprightly strapper with spunk and pluck,
A goodly wopper well made and planned,
A gamey walloper gay and grand,
Nimble and brave and bland and blithe,
Eager and active and brisk and lithe,
Of noted parts and of proved precocity,
Sold to a scold or old hidiosity,
Withered and worn and blear and brown,
A mumbling, grumbling, garrulous clown,
A surly, sluttish and graceless gawk
Knotted and gnarled like a cabbage's stalk,
A sleepy, sluggish decayed old stump,
A useless, juiceless and faded frump.
Ah, woe is me! there's a crumpled crone
Being buckled to-night while I'm left lone,
She's a surly scold and a bold-faced jade
And this moment she's merry – and me a maid!
Why wouldn't they have myself in marriage?
I'm comely and shapely, of stately carriage,
I've a mouth and a smile to make men dream
And a forehead that's fair with ne'er a seam,
My teeth are pearls in a peerless row,
Cherries to vie with my lips pray show,

I've a dancing, glancing, entrancing eye,
Roguish and rakish and takish and sly,
Gold lacks lustre beside my hair,
And every curl might a saint ensnare,
My cheeks are smooth without stain or spot,
Dimpled and fresh without blemish or blot,
My throat, my hands, my neck, my face,
Rival each other in dainty grace,
I've hips and ankles and lips and breast
And limbs to offer as good as the best.
Look at my waist tight-laced and slim,
I'm not coarse or ragged or rank of limb,
Not stringy or scraggy or lanky or lean
But as fair a female as e'er was seen,
A pleasing, teasing and tempting tart
That might coax and entice the coldest heart.
If I were a tasteless, graceless baggage,
A slummocky scut of cumbrous carriage,
A sloven or slut or frump or fright,
Or maid morose and impolite,
An awkward gawk of ungainly make,
A stark and crooked and stiff old stake,
A senseless, sightless bent old crone,

I wouldn't complain if they left me alone.
I've never been present that I'm aware
At wedding or wake or fete or fair,
At the racing-ring or the hurling-ground
Or wherever the menfolk may be found,
But I've managed to make some shape and show
And been bedizened from top to toe
With stylish hood and starched coiffure
And powder-sprinkled chevelure,
My speckled gown with ribbons tied
And ruffles with the richest vied,
With cardinal of scarlet hue
And facings pleasing to the view,
And cambric apron gaily sown
With blowsy flowers of kind unknown,
And rigid hoops and buckled shoes
With smooth high heels attached by screws
And silken gloves and costly lace
And flounces, fringes, frills and stays.
Mind, do not think I'm an artless gull,
A stupid, unsocial or bashful trull,
Timid, a prey to wayward fancies,
Or shy or ashamed of a man's advances.

I'm ever on view to the crowds that pass
At market or meeting or Sunday Mass,
At supper or social or raffle or race
Or wherever the gayest are going the pace,
At party or pattern or picnic or fete
In hopes that I'd click with some lad soon or late;
But all my pursuit is a futile endeavour,
They've baulked me and bilked me and slipped from me ever,
They've baffled my schemes and my best-conceived art,
They've spurned me and turned from me and tattered my heart;
After all my advances, my ogling and sighing,
My most killing glances, my coaxing and eyeing,
After all I have spent upon readers of palms
And tellers of tea-leaves and sellers of charms.
There isn't a plan you can conceive
For Christmas or Easter or All Saints' Eve,
At the moon's eclipse or the New Year's chime
That I haven't attempted time on time.
I never would sleep a night in bed
Without fruit-stuffed stocking beneath my head,

I would steep my shift in the millstream deep
And await the vows of my spouse in sleep,
With broom I brushed the barn as bid,
My nails and hair in ashpit hid,
Beneath the hearth the flail I laid,
Below my pillow placed the spade,
My distaff in the graveyard's bed,
In lime-kiln low my ball of thread,
The flax I strewed amid the dust,
A cabbage-head in bed-straw thrust,
At every stage, by rage distraught,
The deuce and his dam aloud besought.
'Tis why I am laying my case before ye
That I'm single still at the end of the story,
And age draws near with outrageous pace
To rob my form of its former grace.
O matchless maid, have mercy, pray,
E'er my freshness fade and my charms decay
And you see me left in plight forlorn
My beauty's prime and pride to mourn,
With bleaching hairs, by cares oppressed,
On unfriendly hearths an unwelcome guest.
By blood and wounds, fire, thunder, air,

Of shame and scorn I've borne my share,
My plans and plots foiled and frustrated
Whilst I view my nearest kindred mated.
Jane has a fine and fair-faced spouse
And Kate is waiting to take the vows,
Helen has hooked a handsome buck
And with jeers and gibes derides my luck,
My neighbour Nan is spliced with a spanker
While I'm left on the shelf to cark and canker,
Consider my case and face my plight,
And say if you dare that it's fair and right.
Too long I wait and waste my pains,
One hope untried as yet remains,
A potent charm as I have heard
Is putrid herbs well stewed and stirred,
I know the sort and will proceed
To make it aid me in my need.
A subtle spell that succour brings
Is orchid's leaves and dungfly's wings
And roots of figwort powdered well
With more besides I may not tell.
'Twas wondered everywhere of late
How yonder maid secured a mate,

At Shrove her secret she confessed
And Hallow E'en has seen her braced,
For water-spiders soaked in beer
And withered grass formed all her fare.
So, pity, queen, my lonely plight
Or troth! I'll try the plan to-night.'

Part Two

*

Scarce ended was the maid's harangue
When a gruff old warrior upsprang
Of rugged build and rude attire
And trembling less with age than ire,
A ragged, tattered, battered figure,
And up he stood and spoke with vigour: –
'The devil snatch you, snotty bitch,
You dowdy daughter of a witch,
Our sun's eclipse, sure, is no wonder

And all the ills we labour under,
That still our numbers, wealth and worth
Decay and dwindle from the earth,
For artful women are our ruin
And all we suffer is their doing.
You shameless drab, where is the man
That knows not you and all your clan
Who begging of your betters pass
A streeling, straying, cadging class?
Who is there doesn't know your dad
A brutal, brawling, crawling cad,
A spalpeen without friends or fame
Whom no one speaks of but to blame,
A withe around his waist, his back
Unclad but for a clout of sack?
Believe my words, if he and his
Were all sold up, from what there is
The proceeds would not quench your thirst
When every debt had been disbursed.
Is't not a joke uncommon how
A beggar without sheep or cow
Parades in satin, silk and lace
With handkerchief to fan her face?

Your ruffles and your cambric sleeve
And bonnet cleverly deceive
Altho' beneath your coat, alack,
No shred nor tatter clothes your back.
But who could your make-up discover
Or guess unless he were your lover
That canvas bands your hips encased
And they're not stays that press your waist,
Or that beneath the gloves you wore
Your hands were chapped and cracked and sore?
But tell the court or else must I
How long you've ate your dinner dry
And griped your stomach as with hooks
By eating sour unsalted Bucks.[1]
I've seen the place in which you sleep,
Nor quilt nor cover there you keep,
Nought but a dirty mat outspread
Where not a dog would lay his head,
With neither blanket, rag nor sheet
In your poor frame to keep the heat,
Within a reeking, leaking shack
With sprouting weeds in every crack,

[1] A cheap potato, given to pigs.

With water springing thro' the floor
And trail of hens from door to door
And crazy roof and couples bending
And rain in fearful floods descending.
By all the saints, to see her pass
You'd say she was a likely lass,
With flaunting gown and fine array,
Where did she raise it, who can say?
Come tell us where you got the gown,
Whence have the frills and flounces flown,
Whence came the shoes, whence came the coat,
Whence did the rings and ribbons float?
Just Eevell, grant me too a hearing
And help the hapless men of Erin
By scheming females bought and bound
And like stray bullocks put in pound.
Come hear a case, my own next neighbour
Who makes a living off his labour,
A simple, sober, honest boy
Has taken a jilt to kill his joy.
It makes my heart to smart with passion
To see her flounced out in the fashion,
With corn in barn and scores of cattle

And land and cash in hand to rattle.
I saw her lately at the fair
With lofty look and nose in air
Compelling every passer-by
To doff before her queenly eye.
So proud her air and her address,
So grave her carriage, who would guess
What light repute, what evil fame,
The country gave her whence she came,
Or that the name of that wild wench
Made every matron blush and blench?
The world will talk, as well it may,
Of all her deeds for many a day,
And what at Ibrickane was seen
Or Tiermaclane of meadows green;
Her name and fame will never fade
In Cratlee where the rope is made,
At Ennis, Quin and Killaloe,
And up and down the county thro'.
Oh fie, alas for female fame!
I might forgive her former shame,
But lately far from her abode
I spied her on the Doora Road,

Stretched out as naked as a nigger
Beneath each rude and rough turf-digger.
What grace in rite of clergy dwells!
Or who can read the riddle else?
That she was slender all her life
Until she was a wedded wife,
Tho' every gallant in the land
'Tis known enjoyed her favours bland,
And from the day the priest did read
The Ego Vos that Christ decreed
Till she was running at the paps
Not less than nine months did elapse.
What man alive, if warned before
The wedding service shut the door
And barred escape, would mar his life
And kill contentment with a wife?
Alas! the theme affects me nearly,
And for my knowledge I've paid dearly;
The world knows well how once I held
My head up high, my heart unquelled,
My house with meat and drink replete
Where squires and justices might meet,
My fields in flocks and herds abounding

And rich and poor my praises sounding,
With friends and fame among the great,
A man of substance, worth and weight,
With peace and plenty as my portion –
With Kate I lost both fame and fortune.
She was a damsel plump and fair,
A curl in her comely auburn hair,
A light in her lewd insidious eyes,
And each lure that the daughters of Eve devise,
Shapely and smooth in frame and face,
With a ravishing charm in her air and grace,
My sense and my reason the rogue did steal
And I shook with desire from head to heel.
Lord! for my folly I've paid in full
In taking for wife that trolloping trull,
Day and night I am treading on needles and pins
Since I buckled that bride to my side – for my sins!
We were joined by the glue of the joiner for ever
In the splice we might split not till death should dissever,
With my own purse I paid without stint or evasion
Every debt that was due for that day's dissipation,
The town I regaled with a fabulous feast

And paid a fat fee to the clerk and the priest,
The neighbours were gathered from far and from wide
To carouse at the cost of the bridegroom and bride,
The torches were lit and the tables spread thick
With drink till each guest was stretched speechless and sick,
There was music and singing and sets of quadrilles
With the men in their frocks and the ladies in frills.
Ah, would they had crammed me with meat and with wine
Till I choked and I never had lived to repine
With the wretch who has wrested my comfort away
And driven me senseless and friendless and gray!
Not long was I married before I was told
By neighbours and strangers, by young and by old,
She was gadding to revels and reckless carouses
With lovers in legions, both single and spouses.
I believed not a word that I heard of her fame
Nor would suffer one speck to besmirch her good name
And set down to malice or idle invention
Whatever the gossips against her might mention,

Whilst like a fond fool I believed all the lies
Which her false lips affirmed with sobs and with sighs.
No idle reports or vain rumours were they
That came to my ears both by night and by day,
For no further the painful account to pursue –
Young master appeared long before he was due.
Picture at waking my wonder and fright –
A family warming me after the night!
The mother in bed and the midwife attending,
For posset and sugar and fresh fuel sending.
Not a sight nor a peep could I get of the pup,
The women to hoodwink me covered him up,
' 'Twere wrong to expose him, so young and so frail,
The wind would destroy if a breath should assail.'
They argued and pleaded and weeping implored,
I threatened with fury and swore by the Lord,
I stamped and I ramped and I raged and reviled
Until weary of strife they surrendered the child.
'Lift him up gently, have care how you take him,
Mind not to bruise him or squeeze him or shake him,
A fall she had forced him before the date surely,

It's ten chances to one that he'll die prematurely,
If he lives till the morning in time for the priest
To be called for the christening he's better deceased.'
I cut the knot from the swathing wrap
And laid the baby across my lap –
By heaven, the child was a powerful brat,
Sturdy and strong and bonny and fat,
Without flaw in flesh, in blood or in bone,
With nostrils wide and with nails full-grown,
Broad and brawny in thighs and chest
And with face and figure as good as the best!
I laughed aloud at the vain delusion
And the women were covered with fright and confusion.
This bond of the prelates I pray you revoke
For the sake of the necks not yet under the yoke,
'Tis the cause of the dearth and decrease of our nation
And the source of our sickly and sad generation,
But a brave breed of heroes would spring in its place,
If this bar were removed, to replenish the race,
For why call a priest in to bind and to bless
Before candid nature can give one caress?
Why lay the banquet and why pay the band

To blow their bassoons and their cheeks to expand?
Since Mary the Mother of God did conceive
Without calling the clergy or begging their leave,
The love-gotten children are famed as the flower
Of man's procreation and nature's power;
For love is a lustier sire than law
And has made them sound without fault or flaw,
And better and braver in heart and head
Than the puny breed of the bridal bed,
In body and brains and gifts and grace
The palm is borne by the bastard race.
'Tis easy to prove the thing I say
For I've one of my own, mavrone,[1] this day,
Look at him on his nurse's knee,
Let him be brought that the court may see.
Say when did you see so fine a creature?
Where is his flaw in form or feature?
'Tis easily known when grown a man
Passers will pause his shape to scan.
He's not feeble or frail or pale or thin
Nor a shapeless bundle of bone and skin,
Not lean or lanky or sickly or sad

[1] Alas.

But an eager and active and lusty lad.
Never an aged sire begat
In a cold embrace that comely brat,
A weary, wasted and worn old man,
Wrinkled and shrunk and weak and wan,
But some sturdy stripling, brisk and brave,
Tingling and taut with nature's crave.
Then, O peerless maid, impose no more
To sully our stock this senseless law,
But let simple nature and noble blood
Mix and make a godlike brood;
Let high and low in love unite
Like the birds and beasts by nature's right,
And tell the tidings of this decree
In the cot and the castle from sea to sea.
'Twill restore to Erin the spirit of old
And rear a race of heroic mould
With back and sinews and thighs and chest
Such as Gaull MacMorna of yore possessed;
The seas will be filled with more fish than now
And the mountains yield to the tooth of the plough
And your name will be lauded far and wide
And your fame in the land for ever abide.'

Part Three

*

Meanwhile the maid could scarce restrain
The angry tears which sprang amain,
With shaking voice and eyes inflamed
Rose she in wrath and thus exclaimed: –
'O wretch, by Craglee's crown I swear
But that you're old and crazed with care
And but for the ceremony that's due
To this court 'twould be short till I'd do for you!
I'd knock your noddle 'gainst the table

And break your bones and your limbs disable,
And wring your stringy windpipe well
And pitch your soul to the pit of hell.
I wonder breathless at your brass
But I'll not let the libel pass,
The story straightway I'll relate
Of that unhappy fair one's fate.
She was poor and in sad plight
Without shelter from wind and rain at night,
Homeless and driven for no sin
From fence to ditch without friends or kin.
The old stick offered her silver and gold,
A roof and turf from the rain and cold,
Flax and wool to weave and wear,
And cattle and sheep and goods and gear.
The world and this worm himself well knew
She cared not for him nor ever could do,
But worn by want and her abject state
Chose the lesser ill of an unloved mate.
Woeful work was his weak embrace
And the old goat's rough mouth on her face,
His limbs of lead and his legs of ice
And his lifeless load on her breast and thighs,

His blue-blotched shins so bleak and cold
And the bleached skin hanging in fold on fold.
Was there ever a fine girl fresh and fair
Who would not grow gray with grief and care
To bed with a bundle of skin and bone
As cold and stiff as a stick or stone,
Who would scarcely lift the lid from the dish
To know was it flesh or fowl or fish?
Ah say, I pray, had she not the right
To one caress in the course of a night?
Did she fail thro' her fault d'you think?
'Tis sure from her share she ne'er would shrink;
The brunt of the battle she would not burke
Or blench if the livelong night were work.
If he got the horns he deserved the same
And the luckless lady was not to blame;
Where's the fox that prowls or the owl that preys
Or the fish that swims or the stag that strays
That would starve or stint for a single day
With booty there to be borne away?
Is there bird or beast in the whole wide earth
That would droop and die from drouth or dearth
And peck the pavement or bite the ground

Where pastures fat and fruits abound?
Come answer me this, you cur, confess,
Is the table poorer, the banquet less,
Does the dish disgust which pleased before,
Does the pang of hunger plague the more,
Is the rapture fainter, the flavour fled,
If a score of others before have fed?
Do you dread, you dotard, of drouth to die,
Can you drain the Shannon or drink it dry,
Can you draw the sea from its base of sand,
Or hold its waters within your hand?
Learn your folly, you mangy hound,
Go bind your eyes with a bandage round,
Don't fume or fret or resentment chew,
If the fair has favours for more than you,
If she saw her lovers the livelong day
Is the night not enough for your purpose, pray?
The blame, I own, would be not so great
In a young and limber and lusty mate,
A frisky flaker in manhood's noon,
A sly heart-breaker or gay gossoon,
A roguish coaxer or sprightly spark,
A tasty trickster nate and smart,

Bonny and brisk and blithe and bold
With features and form of comely mould;
But see what he is, a stunted stick
Lifeless and limp with scarce a kick.
It's often I've asked and sought in vain
What is the use of the rule insane
That marriage has closed to the clerical clan
In the church of our fathers since first it began.
It's a melancholy sight to a needy maid
Their comely faces and forms displayed,
Their hips and thighs so broad and round,
Their buttocks and breasts that in flesh abound,
Their lustrous looks and their lusty limbs,
Their fair fresh features, their smooth soft skins,
Their strength and stature, their force and fire,
Their craving curbed and uncooled desire.
They eat and drink of the fat of the land,
They've wealth and comfort at their command,
They sleep on beds of the softest down,
They've ease and leisure their lot to crown,
They commence in manhood's prime and flood,
And well we know that they're flesh and blood!
If I thought that sexless saints they were

Or holy angels, I would not care,
But they're lusty lads with a crave unsated
In slothful sleep, and the maids unmated.
We know it is true there are few but hate
The lonely life and the celibate state;
Is it fair to condemn them to mope and moan,
Is it fair to force them to lie alone,
To bereave of issue a sturdy band
The fruit of whose loins might free the land?
Tho' some of them ever were grim and gruff,
Intractable, sullen and stern and tough,
Crabbed and cross, unkind and cold,
Surly and wont to scowl and scold,
Many are made of warmer clay,
Affectionate, ardent, kind and gay;
It's often a woman got land or wealth,
Store or stock from a priest by stealth,
Many's the case I call to mind
Of clergymen who were slyly kind,
I could show you women who were their flames
And their children reared beneath false names;
And often I must lament in vain
How they waste their strength on the old and plain

While marriageable maids their plight deplore
Waiting unwooed thro' this senseless law;
'Tis a baleful ban to our hapless race
And beneath its sway we decay apace.
O fount of wisdom, I leave to you
To declare and reveal the reason true;
Deceived and undone they sleep I deem,
Illumine my mind with the gospel's gleam,
What did the prophets preach, I pray,
Or Saint Paul whose words were weighty say?
The scripture, if I remember, ran
The taint of the flesh is the fruit of this ban,
Paul the Apostle said to none
To abandon marriage, but lust to shun,
Your closest kindred to leave and go
To cleave to your wife for weal or woe;
God did not wish the mother forsaken
And the part of the women the prophets have taken.
'Tis a senseless thing for the like of me
Your instructor in sacred writ to be,
You yourself, O sovran bright,
Remember the holy words aright,

The sense of every saying is plain
To you, and each act that the saints ordain.
Then, O daughter of kings, revoke this law,
Let it stand to mar our stock no more,
Release the clergy to mate and breed
That the land may teem with their sturdy seed,

Do not deny the women redress
Nor leave them to languish in this distress,
See how the ground in crowds they cumber
And by three to one they the men outnumber;
The smallest shoots that you pass to-day
Springing unseen from the fertile clay
To-morrow will yield a crop mature
To rot on the stem and drop obscure.
Ah woe is me! my words are vain
And to what end do I thus complain?
What are my tears and entreaties worth
Or how can I hope in the face of this dearth?
With this land of the best of its men bereft
And none but weaklings and wastrels left,
With our comely girls growing old and gray
Waiting for someone the word to say,

And so desperate and desolate grown that they'll
Take anything that can be called a male.
Take the men, harness them by our side
And there obedient bid them bide.'

Part Four

*

Soon as the maid had told her woes
The gentle lady radiant rose,
Her face the fairest eye has scanned,
Her voice the sweetest in the land.
She rose with mien and manner grave
And thus considered sentence gave,
The whole court hearkening in suspense
With eager expectation tense: –
'Oh sorrow-stricken maid, your tear

And prayer fall not unheeded here;
We see, and the sad sight deplore,
The seed of Orla, Maive and Mor
A dwindling, dying, shrinking breed
Unsought by suitors in their need,
Unwooed, unwed and gone to waste,
By waxing offspring unreplaced.
Hence we decree that from this date
The adult male without a mate
Be taken up and tightly tied
Against this tree the tomb beside,
Of coat and shirt be naked stript
And with a stout cord soundly whipt.
But those who well in years have gone
And still have basely hid the horn,
Who've wasted manhood's force and fire
Without delight from their desire,
Who've spent their strength and past their prime
And not made hay in summertime,
Ye spinsters sad, I leave to you
To wreak revenge upon the crew;
Go wrack and wrench and rend and flay
Or with slow fire consume their clay,

With wracking pangs your wrongs requite
And straightway strive to sate your spite,
With female art their fate devise
And heed ye not their craven cries.
There came a whisper to my ears –
Speak soft and low, who knows who hears?
With hand on mouth, by me be taught,
It is not safe to say your thought –
Beware the while the powers that be,
They'll have to marry yet, you'll see,
Tho' long deferred the day will come
With licence from the Pope at Rome;
They'll sit in council on your case
And straight release the priestly race
In east and west and south and north
To woo and wed and wax thenceforth.
Good folk, farewell, I cannot stay,
The hour is late and long the way,
Delay won't suit, my calls won't bide,
The guilt is proved, the case is tried.
'Twill not be long till I return –
The men unmarried 'twill concern
And heartless gallants who aspire

To rouse and not requite desire,
Who love to lightly kiss and tell
And boast what fortune them befell,
Who woo with false and feigning smiles
And ruin maids with wanton wiles;
They do not act from am'rous fire,
From youth's hot blood and bland desire,
But as bold rogues and rakes to pose
And puff their breasts and boast as beaus.
I'll deal with these without delay,
But first I hence must haste away,
I'll bind them with the nuptial vow
When I return, a month from now.'
She ceased and I was seized with dread,
My heart sank sick and swam my head,
My blood ran cold, my sight grew blear,
My knees knocked fit to fail with fear;
Her sentence did my sense dumbfound
And still there dinned its dismal sound.
The bailiff on the bench beheld
My fainting fit by fright compelled,
She dragged me by the ear and drew
And dropped me in the public view.

The maid leapt up on vengeance bent
To vent her venom and torment,
With vigorous spite and vexèd spleen
She rose and yelled with oaths obscene: –
‘ ’Tis long I’ve marked you, lousy lout,
A lazy lump your life throughout,
How oft you were pursued and sought
By needy maids, responding nought!
What sons you as their sire proclaim?
What woman thanks you for the same?
What favour can you hope to find
Or how escape the scourge assigned?
To whose protection can you trust
Or how evade our vengeance just?
O queen, your justice now begin,
There’s no excuse can save his skin,
Tho’ bent his back and rude his build
When blooms are rare a weed is culled,
Whate’er is male for mating’s meet,
Mis-shapen cows give milk that’s sweet,
’Twixt homely swain and handsome spark
We see no difference in the dark.
I shake with zeal to testify,

'Tis vain to shuffle or deny,
Your guilt is graven on your brow –
Two score without the nuptial vow!
O peerless maid, my wrongs I pray
Upon this wretch I may repay,
Come friends and catch and bind him fast,
Let's make the rogue repent at last!
Go, Una, fetch a knotted rope,
Be busy, Anne, and cease to mope,
Go, Mary, bring a cord and bind
The prisoner's hands his back behind,
Come, Maureen, Jane and Kate and Maive,
And sate your spite upon the slave,
Lay on the lash with might and main
And pierce him with the sharpest pain!
Regard not cries or screams or groans
But flay the flesh from off his bones,
And let the blood in rivers flow
From back and sides at every blow!
Strain arms and raise the scourge on high,
With tireless zeal the torment ply,
And let the rumour run and make
The hearts of the unmarried quake!

To-day a new reign is begun
Of peace since Women's Rights are won;
Our waiting and our weeping past,
Our tears and prayers prevail at last.
I beg you take five score and ten,
Subtract it from a thousand then,
And double the remainder pray,
And date the year One from that day!'[1]
I heard with reeling head my fate,
When as she paused to pen the date
I broke from sleep, forgot my pain,
And woke to light and life again.

[1] 1780, the date the poem was written.

THE ADVENTURES OF A LUCKLESS FELLOW

TRANSLATED BY PERCY ARLAND USSHER FROM
THE GAELIC OF DENIS MACNAMARA

In Two Parts

Part One

*

I could tell you a tale of the ancient time
Of deeds and names renowned in rime,
Of Brian Boru or the Fenians' lustre
Or the great MacLobus's mighty muster,
But the fame of these fables poor will pale
When the world has heard my own true tale.
Hard was my lot in a hapless land
Stricken beneath the strangers' hand,
Her people feebled and dispossessed

And warfare wasting the blood of her best.
Teaching in school was my irksome trade
And 'tis known that that is but poorly paid,
But I banished my woes with wenches and wine
Without thought for the morrow each hour that was mine,
And I made no store for the time of need
But the shilling I earned I spent with speed.
One night as I lay on my lonely bed
I thought of the dreary life I led,
How heavy my toil, how light my gains,
And better it would repay the pains
To work for a farmer at shovelling clay
Or guiding horses or driving a dray,
Or, better, to bide in Erin no more
But leave the land for a kinder shore
And embark with the first fair breeze that blew
To try my fortune in pastures new.
I lightly leapt from my bed next day
With the joy of the thought and would make no stay,
I eagerly grasped my stick, a stout ashen,
And a new felt hat with a flap in the fashion,
And I said farewell to each friend and neighbour,

And to some I said it with no great labour,
And the first ship leaving this churlish strand
Should bear me, I swore, to a bounteous land
Where parts and learning would not be spurned,
Where gold was plenty and easily earned.
Be it known to all what the neighbours brought
Of victuals and drink for my support,
And what provisions and goods they gave
To pull me thro' perils by land and wave.
There were seven stone oatmeal and enough
Of scrapings out of the kneading-trough
And a big black chest so long and deep
'Twould answer alike for store or sleep;
A barrel of red potatoes too
That many a day would see me thro',
A piece of meat of a mighty size,
A crock of butter with salt likewise;
There were seven score eggs of ducks and hens
To carry me to my journey's ends
And a cask of ale that had sailed from Spain
And might put life in the dead again;
I had tidy jackets to press my hips
And shoes, and shirts to my finger tips,

And blankets and sheets my limbs to wrap
Tied to my trunk with a stout leather-strap,
And a beaver and wig my crown to fit
And many things more that I here omit.
Thus bold as Conan of old straightway
To Waterford town I made my way
And got lodging and board with a maiden bland,
The loveliest lass in all the land;
A grace in her gait and a light in her look,
With lips that smiled or with laughter shook,
Buxom and blithe and fond of a jest,
Kind and complacent to every guest;
She was quick to heed and a handy drawer
And each tipple you took she'd taste before,
And by word or deed you could not offend –
At least if she knew you had money to spend.
The ways of a woman I can't explain
But the smile from me made her smile again.
She powdered my wig like the sparks of the town
And dressed me fully from foot to crown,
And never intruded the curst account
But gave me credit to any amount.
Her stingy mamma was a different tale,

She'd have every penny paid down on the nail
And would never forgive me a quart or a day
Tho' I should go on my knees and pray.
For a few days' space did I there abide
For a ship to start o'er the waters wide
Till I met a skipper about to sail
And the bargain was clinched o'er a glass of ale.
I paid my score and I packed my kit
And with eager haste did my quarters quit,
To Passage I drove with the postman's hack
And a load of herrings behind my back.
The officers there were at drink and play,
They bade me briskly my name to say,
But Latin and Gaelic were all I spoke,
So the clerk wrote 'M' in the book with a stroke.
My trunk and stores were stowed in the hold
Whilst I quaffed and sang with the captain bold.
E'er long we launched, the sails were spread,
We passed the pier, we cleared the head,
We bounded into the ocean vast,
Aeolus drove us, the ship flew fast.
But 'twas short till our joy was turned to pain
And we wished we were safe on shore again,

Keelty O'Keefe refused his food
By nausea gnawed and pangs subdued,
Teigue O'Leary sobbed and swore
He'd never see wife or children more,
Peter O'Dowd with a violent fit
Freely spued over Felim's kit,
Gerald O'Dower had speechless grown
And Michael and Murty were making moan,
Terence and Tim in tearing throes
Were drawing my bung to drown their woes,
Shamus O'Toole on the floor had rolled
And Carbry was suffering woes untold,
Dermot declared, distraught by pain,
That the half of us would not see Erin again;
Thus did they all their anguish vent,
Wearied and worn, by sickness spent,
And myself in no happier plight than they
Stretched on the floor exhausted lay
Like a sack, of ease and of rest bereft
With no kick or whistle or cry in me left,
Like a slaughtered ox, without speech or motion,
And retching with every heave of the ocean –
But shame forbids I should treat at length

Of the ills I endured till returned my strength.
'Twas often I prayed to end my pain
That a storm might blow us to port again,
I had sooner be saved out of that distress
Than all the wealth in the world possess
Or all the riches of Croesus' court
Or the golden fleece that Jason sought,
Or than win for my wife that Deirdre bright
For whom fell Usna's sons in fight,
Or the treasure King George did in Flanders stow
When he fled to Hanover from the foe.
I'd have given, I swear it, these and more
To be safe in port and my suffering o'er
Or back in the home I had left behind
Drinking the ale with the neighbours kind,
Or teaching the urchins in school again
Or selling my trenchers on fair Finisk's plain,
With the priest who taught me when I was young
Or in Georgestown the gentry among
With fair Richard the best of the Powers
Or with Peter Kennedy chatting for hours,
Or in famed Slieve Gua of goodly cheer,
Retreat to scholars and scribblers dear,

Or in far Cratloe where my kindred dwell
Or Clancullen of fighters hard to quell,
Or in Limerick of ships by Shannon's shore
Where many's the pint I drank of yore,
Or in the pleasant boreens of Kill
Where I used to court and my heart is still,
Or with William Moran who'll drop the tear
And keen an old song over my bier -
A hundred blisses I dreamed were true
As folk in distress are wont to do.

Part Two

*

Now heed me well the while I tell
What wonders ne'er before befell.
Amidst my moans and grievous sighs
There came a dame of gracious guise,
Her cheek was red, her eye was kind,
Her tresses hung down loose behind,
Her face and form did both declare
The queen of Craglee, Eevell fair.
Upon my brow her hand she placed

And bore me o'er the weltering waste,
A thousand leagues of sea and land
Thro' vacant space with speed we spanned,
O'er Afric's sands and Arctic snows
Where earth extends or ocean flows;
We halted on a trackless shore
By traveller's foot ne'er trod before,
Beneath a bank with briars about
Appeared a cave whence wind rushed out;
I asked my guide with air forlorn
To what dread lair I had been borne,
To which the answer swift gave she: -
'Fear nought that you may hear or see.
Far in my rocky Munster home
I heard your prayer upon the foam,
A glimpse of marvels you shall gain
To recompense you for your pain,
Of living men you are the first
That into this abode has burst.'
The maiden ceased and bold as brass
We clambered thro' the gloomy pass
Until by eve's declining gleam
We saw the glassy Stygian stream;

To this shore every mother's son
Drifts when his share of days is done;
A thousand sad ghosts flock before
The flood that they may ne'er pass o'er,
Tho' not as pagan Vergil writes
The unburied corpses' unblessed sprites,
The hosts that muster on the brink
Were broke thro' dice and drabs and drink,
Blew all their means in making merry
And hadn't a fluke to pay the ferry.
That same pretender idly wrote
'Twas Charon steered the Stygian boat;
The rascal lies - a jovial cock
We there beheld, of Irish stock,
A whacker stout of warlike mould,
To wit, Conan the Fenian bold;
A ewe's black fleece was round him thrown
Which sign sufficed to make him known;
From every Saxon he would ask
A silver sixpence for the task,
And from him Gaelic's all you'd hear.
Soon as he saw what folk drew near
He darkly frowned and dropped his oar

And furious as a bull did roar: –
'You curst old crust and stinking hag,
What thing is this you dare to drag
Within a clime where never clay
Has entrance found until to-day?
I've half a mind, to tell you true,
To soundly trounce the pair of you.'
'Give ear,' replied the gentle queen,
'And cease from this unseemly scene,
This man by troubles tossed and worn
Is of our noble nation born.'
At that the hero gave a shout
That sounded the whole world throughout,
The heavens trembled at the tone
And hell gave forth an echoing groan.
We boarded straight the waiting craft
Which swift us o'er the wave did waft;
Upon the river's further brim
The portal stood of portent grim;
Before its base a mastiff lay
Which howled and growled the livelong day;
The pagan thief here, I confess,
Speaks truth, 'twas Cerberus, no less;

A heap of vetch-straw formed his bed
On which his loathly length was spread.
Within a trice our warrior tough
Had seized the monster by the scruff,
With fearless grip he held him fast
While we in mortal dread ran past
Nor dared a moment's space to stop
Until we gained a hillock's top.
From thence we viewed a meadow wide
With multitudes on either side,
We paused and lent attentive ear
Their names and histories to hear.
'Behold yon host,' our hero said,
'The Gaels, who ne'er from battle fled;
See how they tear up roots apace
And fling them in the foemen's face;
The vanquished Dananns to a man
Make off as quickly as they can,
The valiant Gaels pursue with howls
And strew the plain with brains and bowels.
The Greeks and Trojans yonder stand
Who vaunt their deeds by sea and land;
The escaping band who scorch like blacks

From blazing Troy are making tracks;
Mark well the labouring pair who lay
The stones of Rome which stand to-day;
Observe the poets who delight
Their amorous ditties to indite;
There Horace with Maecenas still
In vitriol dips his dreaded quill,
There Ovid on a bank reclines
And languid pens his wanton lines,
There Juvenal with righteous rage
Rebukes the vices of his age;
But Hugh McCurtin of our race
Puts all these in the halfpenny place,
His verse's sweetness might avail
The buried from their shrouds to hale.
Next notice, distant a few perches,
Those mighty men as tall as churches,
These for the noble Fenians know
Who were the dread of every foe.
Alas, Finn, what would I not give
That you and I one hour might live
To friend our country in her need
And spiflicate her foes with speed!

We would bring o'er the son of James
With Scotland's help to back his claims.
See Luther there, the turncoat mean,
And Calvin, swoll'n with fat and spleen,
And Henry and his harlot bride
To malefactors' gibbets tied;
All heretics who pass them smite
The wicked four who quenched the light,
But those beyond whose limbs are free
The Kingdom of God's Son shall see.
Return, O man of Irish race,
With this news to your native place,
Not long shall James's loyal folk
Groan under the usurper's yoke;
A hero shortly shall appear
Who'll make the Saxon curs look queer,
The golden age he will restore
And end our woes for evermore.
Shun sin that stains all Adam's kind,
To prayer and fasting give your mind,
Obey God's mandates every hour,
And heaven's bliss shall be your dower.
Farewell, a summons calls me back

From some of Luther's cursèd pack,
The French have slain a host of late
And now at Styx's wave they wait.'
He ceased, and bounded out of our sight,
And we went forth, how I know not quite,
As a rabbit is by a handspit driven
We came out to the light of heaven.
That I woke from sleep is the next I know
Stretched on my bunk with my trunk below;
'Twas long indeed e'er I could recall
What brought me in such a place at all,
But most of all, as you may believe,
Did the notion I had been dreaming grieve.
But now a man at the maintop signed
That a ship approached with the wind behind,
I heard the captain cry *'Helm alee!'*
– Sweet, I swear, was the message to me –
'Gunner give fire, we'll fight the negroes,
We'll conquer or die, my Irish heroes!
All hands aloft!' [1] I was soon on the scene
In my shirt and bearing a cutlass keen,
Muskets and powder round were passed,

[1] The italicised lines are in English in the original.

Thunder and lightning pealed and flashed,
Side by side our decks we drew
Blazing away till all was blue,
Dead and wounded were round me falling,
Great was the groaning and shouting and bawling,
The fearful din of that dismal fray
Was heard in Cork many leagues away.
'Twas a trim French frigate fresh-fitted for fight
And 'twas not long till we took to flight,
The fire of her forty guns was more
Than our men could bear or had bargained for,
Pools of blood on the deck lay deep
And heads and limbs in a hideous heap,
From a wound in my side the pain was fierce,
And another piece did my temple pierce;
'Haul yards, stand by and hoist the mainsail,
Haul tacks and sheets and free the staysails.'
But at length if the bare truth must be told
We were captured and laid below in the hold;
There we were penned in piteous plight,
Famished and dry, for a day and a night,
Faint with fasting, fatigue and pain
And seeking for means of escape in vain,

Till a barrel of ale mid the bales we spied
And we drank a draught and our weakness died,
We burst a road thro' the roof and poured
On Lewis's folk and a victory scored,
We took them and clapped them clear and clean
In the crib where ourselves before had been.
To east we turned as the day was failing
Straight for the ports of Ireland sailing;
Of the Frenchmen's crew were killed a score
And the number of men who were maimed was more,
Three of our company were laid low
And fifteen bruises and wounds could show;
The captain's boy had received a shot –
He had stolen my cap and I pitied him not.
Safe at Passage we landed at last
And I rode alone to Waterford fast,
A month I was stretched in piteous pain
Till God's Son gave me my health again.
Then I came home without more delay,
And believe my word or not as you may,
Never again on a boat I swear
Will I go 'less you bind me and drag me there.

To Christ the Author of all be praise,
Strengthen and succour us all our days,
Loosen, we pray, our bonds of sin
That into Thy Kingdom we may come in,
Free us and fit us to share Thy glory
And friend us ever. Here ends my story.

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